

Central MRS Meeting Notes
May 23, 2007
Forsyth County Library

Counties Present: Alamance, Cabarrus, Chatham, Davidson, Forsyth, Gaston, Guilford, Iredell, Lee, Person, Randolph, Rockingham, Yadkin

Introductions

News from Raleigh

Canada

New Secretary Dep Dempsey Benson

Discussion Items

Stopping Family Assessments

CFTs

CFSR Issue

Shared Parenting

Services Recommended

Canada

- Patrick and Holly did a presentation in Toronto for the province of Ontario Canada (which is about the size of Texas.)
- In Canada they do Child Welfare differently than we do. They have private agencies (children's aid societies) that are government funded who do their Child Welfare. There are 85 of these agencies and 100% of them attended.
- Had about 600-700 supervisors in the province and 603 were at this symposium
- They implemented differential response in April of this last year so they are still new at it. Are not doing all of the 7 strategies, just differential response.
- One woman is coming to Roanoke VA and wanted to come visit a county nearby when she is there. Were very interested in CFTs.
- Patrick and Holly were very well received, people wanted them to come back and visit their individual agencies, and also expressed interest in coming to a county here in NC – even mentioned an exchange program with Guilford.

New Secretary Dempsey Benson

- Just announced that he will be the new Secretary.
- He was the head of the task force that dealt with the Chemical fire in Apex (that is all we really know at this point!).

Forsyth County – have special services for relative caregivers

- Any relative caregiver can get supportive services in the Community so that they never have to come in DSS.
- These can also be used by families that are involved with DSS.
- Were just awarded a second grant through the Brookdale Foundation.
- Have a lot of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and great grandparents, and are now starting to see siblings as well, so the support groups are composed of very diverse groups of people and have been very successful and the participants really enjoy the experience and have customized their groups.

5104 Contributory Factors

- DCD May 9th letter addressing the completion and entry of Contributory Factors .
- Should be completed for cases substantiated and found In Need of Services.
- We are only getting about 20 % of cases that have contributory factors.

Stopping Family Assessments

Wanted to discuss the policy around the ability to cease family assessments if you get there and find out that the report was baseless. Now you have to do all the Structured Decision Making tools, but there is no finding, so no Central Registry report. The only thing this lets you out of is contacting collaterals. (Might not save you much time, but if there are 15 collaterals, it will.)

This policy was not meant for malicious reports, the policy was made to address cases where there was misinformation and should have never been made. Cases where, if all the correct information had been known, the report would never had been made, or it would have been screened out. For example: A child was reported with severe burns, but after visiting discovered that the child has severe eczema and the family is treating appropriately.

Malicious reports may be made for the wrong motivation but doesn't mean they are not true. There is a separate malicious report policy.

- Most people have done one or none at all. Some have talked about it but never done it.

This then begs the question, do we even need this policy?

- Counties here felt like we did need the policy but need clarification on it to know when they could use it. They haven't used it but they talked about it and couldn't be sure their case would be appropriate.
- One other county had the discussion when they had a case called in my one parent on the other.
- Shared the example from yesterday about the child with eczema that was reported for severe burns.
- Several counties are having trouble with separated parents who repeatedly call in on each other. Some of these might be malicious reports. Some counties have addressed this with a CFT during the assessments so that everyone came together and DSS could let them realize what they were doing to their child.
- Counties felt like if you get rid of it, then people will want it, they would be more comfortable with keeping it – doesn't mean people have to use it.

Then how can we make it more clear?

- Examples at the end of the paragraph so that people could conceptualize it .
- Point out that the only shortcut of doing it this way is that you don't have to contact collaterals.
- Specify that the policy is not to be used in cases where it is suspected that the reporter may have malicious intent and may be lying.

Reporting on these cases

- If you use this policy and close the case, how do you track it? Do you do 5104 (see conversation from yesterday)
- What about the case decision summary? Does it need to be included?

CFT

Required within 30 days of case decision, quarterly thereafter, if high or intensive risk must have a facilitator that is not the SW for the case. Case plans must be completed in CFTs.

- Most people here are holding these and are making the case plans at these meetings.
- Yesterday issues came up about Foster Care. CFTs are still required, but they are not included in Chapter 4 (Foster Care) because this was not revised when Chapter 8 (CPS) was.
 - PPAP and CFT – same or different? This was a topic of discussion at a previous meeting, for more discussion on this see notes from those meetings (June 2006.)
 - Typically PPAPs are not as flexible and are always at the DSS, whereas CFTs are more flexible.
 - Alamance county developing a protocol for combining PPAPs, CFTs.
- Forsyth is a county that got the Governor's CFT in the schools. They are struggling with getting the family to be ok with the school social worker being there. Parents are at odds with the school system and don't want them there. Sometimes they are able to talk with the families and also the school social workers and get them to agree to meet, but sometimes they just can't.

What are the issues with policy that we need to tighten up?

- Pre-petition CFTs. Want to be careful not to put a child at risk and therefore sometimes don't have these, but want to be cautious so that we don't just use the potential or imagined risk as a reason not to have a CFT. (Ex: think the parents might flee with the child.) Staff might be using this as excuse when MRS and CFTs is still new.
- Guilford has been doing pre-petition meetings for 5 years now and doesn't feel that they have ever placed a child at risk because of this meeting. Not saying that it couldn't happen, but they have never seen it.
 - Not only that – many times these meetings prevent a placement. Allows DSS to explain to the family that DSS does not want their kids – tells them that if a safe plan can be made at the meeting, then DSS will not take custody.

CFSR Issues

Dealing with non-custodial parents. This was a big issue with the CFSR.

During the assessment you are to contact the non-custodial parent if you have any way of locating them. The Feds want this to continue into case management. They want them involved in CFTs and the case plan. We know that many of them won't participate, but during our review there was no indication that they were ever even invited.

We need to know what would help policy be more clear.

- Recommended that policy spell it out clearly that they should continue to be involved in 215 and included in CFTs.
- Some people get emotional about this and feel that if a non custodial parent isn't initially enthusiastic then they are bad, and we don't want to go out of the way to get involved with them. Judgments should wait.

- Try to get this parent involved, maybe their situation has changed since the birth of the child when they may not have been too involved.
 - Maybe the custodial parent is causing the problem.
 - If this parent is not a good person to be in the child's life, maybe their mother or someone else in the family could be a support or possibly a placement resource if it comes to that.
- What if mother doesn't want father involved? According to the feds, that is not the mother's option if she is not providing a safe environment for the child. Unless there are legal custodial issues or safety issues (like he beat them), we need to consider his involvement. Not her right to decide if he gets the opportunity to be involved..
 - Just because she doesn't like him, and the Assessment shows no safety concerns, the case is not just about mom and her children. Mom says she really doesn't want us to contact the dad, are we obligated to call him? Yes. Even if there are no safety concerns you must call him. How do you know that mom is being honest with you about the relationship?
- How much information is the non-custodial parent entitled to? If you have not TPRed you have an obligation to provide information to them. Like drugs? Only share information as it pertains to the safety of the child, not personal lifestyles of the other parent.

Shared Parenting

1 meeting required within 7 days of child coming into care. Know this needs to be added to Chapter 4. Probably need to beef that up and ensure that there is some type of continuing contact. Know that each case will vary, but what would be a minimum?

- Guilford has been struggling with continuing Shared Parenting. Know that each case is very different depending on the allegations, the parent's situations, etc. They do the first meeting and then sort of leave it up to the two sets of parents to continue – but how do we track?
- Davidson county does it at supervised visitations. Let the foster parents come to that.
- Alamance struggles with what do you call Shared Parenting? After that first meeting is anything where the two sets of parents are participating Shared Parenting?
 - There was an issue of Practice Notes that did a very good job talking about it.
 - The Child Placement training is also very good at discussing this.

- Should there be some kind of required time frame for updates? Quarterly with an agency person to ensure that things are going ok? When they initially met safety may have led to a decision for no phone calls. May need to reevaluate after 3 months, maybe phone calls would be ok at that point.
 - Again, would like the policy to provide some examples.
- This was seen as a strength by the feds during the CSFR.
- Dee Hunt suggested that since we already have a Visitation Plan, we could have a Shared Parenting plan.

Services Recommended

Some counties may have been recommending services and then not really providing the families with the resources to take advantage of them. Feds suggested that we might need to do a little handholding to get the families involved with the services we recommend. Policy requires a visit within 7 days to talk about the finding of Services Recommended.

This is for cases where there are well being needs but there are no safety issues and at no time would the safety issues ever have been enough to create adequate risk to substantiate or find In Need of Services. (This differentiates it from Services Provided, CPS services no longer needed, because in those cases there was initially enough risk that had you not put services in place, mandatory services would have been put in place.)

- Do we just say “here is a list of services” and leave, or do we help them make a phone call, get them set up for their first appointment, etc.
- It may be a service that will be provided by a community agency but we can help the family get connected with those agencies.
 - Some counties can use at-risk case management
 - Some counties can use private agencies (LME’s from MH) that will do case management if the family is Medicaid eligible.
 - Some counties have a prevention unit.
 - Open a 330
 - One county hands those families off that meet the 200% of poverty to a position in WF. (Onslow county uses WF as a step down, even for

Safe surrender

Counties yesterday mentioned this because there have been some ads. The ads stress how that people will not be charged and this seems deceptive..

- Not being charged (criminally) is different than not doing a CPS report. We are not charging criminally.
- DSS people feel that the ads are deceptive and we act like we won’t do anything to the parent surrendering the child, and that is not true. We won’t criminally prosecute them, but we will try to find out who they are so that we can proceed with the TPR of the child.
 - Think of it as for the good of the child. The child has the right to know their medical history.
 - Also, what if Dad doesn’t know about the child? He may want it and this would be best for both him and the child as well as his legal right to know.

Summary of Feedback from CSFR

More in depth report on the process was mentioned last month – see April notes for more information.

- Have a workgroup that will be meeting to develop improved policy
 - Court Improvement – improve partnerships with courts and be more timely
 - Family relationships – non-custodial parents
 - Multi-Jurisdictional Issues – cross county issues (the feds see it as a state
 - Cultural Competency – Indian Child Welfare Act, and disproportionality
 - NC's CFSR process – accountability (we have a moratorium on this for 2 months while we revamp this process.)

Future Meetings:

June

Central – June 20th Randolph Co DSS

Eastern – June 28 – Wayne Co. WAGES

West – June 27th – Asheville - St. John's Church

July

East – July 18th Edgecombe Co

West – July 24th – Asheville - St Johns Church